

Edwards: 2009 VA, Military Construction Bill Respects Service of Troops, Veterans

Builds on Historic Veterans Funding Increases in 2008, Clears Subcommittee

(Washington, DC)— U.S. Representative Chet Edwards announced that the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs House unanimously passed its Fiscal Year 2009 bill today, which builds on the historic increases under the 2008 bill to honor the service of U.S. troops, veterans, and their families.

“This bipartisan bill will have positive impact on the quality of care Texas veterans receive in VA hospitals and clinics,” said Edwards, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. “This bill builds on the historic increases in the fiscal year 2008 bill and sends a clear message to America’s servicemen and women, their families, and our veterans that we appreciate and respect their service and sacrifice.”

The \$118.7 billion bill provides \$72.7 billion in discretionary spending overall, \$47.7 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$24.8 billion for Military Construction, Family Housing and BRAC, and \$241 million for related agencies. It is \$3.4 billion more than the President’s request and \$8.8 billion more than the historic fiscal year 2008 bill.

“This bill provides \$400 million above the President’s request to fully fund BRAC, modernize training facilities, and build child care centers, barracks, and homes. This bill includes nearly \$200 million above the president’s request in troop housing for Army and Marine Corps trainees. We want to send the message to soldiers and marines that we value and respect their decision to serve by improving the barracks they live in when they train, as well as an improved quality of life,” said Edwards. “This bill provides \$2.9 billion more than the President’s request for the Department of Veterans Affairs and \$4.6 billion more than fiscal year 2008. Within this funding increase, we provide the Veterans Benefits Administration with the resources to hire 2,100 new claims processors. This bill says to all who have served that just as you have kept your promises to this country, we intend to keep our promises to you.”

The increase for the VA also includes an additional \$1.6 billion above the president’s request for the Veterans Health Administration. These funds will allow the Department to increase access to services, ensure safer facilities and improve treatment including:

- \$568 million to increase enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10 percent;
- \$50 million more to increase the beneficiary travel reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 35 cents for veterans traveling long distances for care;
- \$300 million to address the backlog in non-recurring maintenance at our medical facilities;
- \$200 million to increase access to fee-based care for veterans in areas where the Department

does not offer services;

- \$116 million more to increase availability of new generation prosthetics;
- \$58 million for medical research in trauma, mental health and other areas that are critical to finding the best treatments for our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.
- \$40 million more to provide the additional case workers and medical services needed for our homeless veterans;
- Ensures that the VA will spend no less than \$3.8 billion on specialty mental health services for veterans with mental illness, PTSD, and suicide prevention.
- \$584 million on Substance Abuse programs.
- Additional \$11 million for the Office of Inspector General to provide additional personnel to inspect the community based outpatient clinics and Vet Centers to avoid a Walter Reed scandal in the VA system.
- Increases Department of Veterans Affairs Construction by \$1.1 billion above the president's request, which will provide the needed funding for 6 additional major construction projects and an additional 145 minor construction projects that can be completed in fiscal year 2009.

"The bottom line is I believe this bill does great things to provide for our nation's heroes, and Congress and the President should be proud to support it."

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